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AMERICAN HISTORY LABORATORY PROJECT.

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AN ATTEMPT WAS MADE BY A GROUP OF HISTORIANS TO DEVISE AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE INTRODUCTORY COLLEGE SURVEY COURSE IN AMERICAN HISTORY THAT WOULD GIVE THE STUDENT A MORE REALISTIC IDEA OF HOW HISTORY IS WRITTEN, AND RESCUE HIM FROM HIS PRESENT ESSENTIALLY PASSIVE ROLE OF ABSORBER OR COMMENTATOR AND FREE HIM TO "DO" HISTORY. THE PROJECT TOOK THE FORM OF AN EXPERIMENTAL COURSE FOR 20 COLLEGE SOPHOMORES, GIVEN IN THE SUMMER OF 1966 AT SMITH COLLEGE, NORTHAMPTON, MASSACHUSETTS. THE STAFF ATTEMPTED TO INDUCE EACH STUDENT TO TRANSFORM AN INTEREST OF HIS INTO A LEGITIMATE HISTORICAL INQUIRY--QUESTION FORMULATION, RESEARCH, AND WRITING. THE PROJECT MET WITH ONLY LIMITED SUCCESS. MOST OFTEN THE STUDENTS LACKED THE RESOURCES AND SKILLS TO "DO" HISTORY IN THE TOTAL SENSE. AT THE TIME OF REPORTING, THE EXPERIMENT WAS BEING CONTINUED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 1966-67. THE STAFF THERE WAS INCORPORATING CERTAIN MODIFICATIONS SUGGESTED BY THE SUMMER EXPERIENCE. INSTEAD OF ASKING THE STUDENTS TO GENERATE THEIR OWN PROJECTS, THE STAFF WAS CONFRONTING THEM WITH THE BODY OF DOCUMENTS RELATING TO A CHOSEN HISTORICAL EVENT. THE STAFF WAS ALSO ATTEMPTING TO CHALLENGE THE ASSUMPTION THAT PROJECTS OF THE STUDENTS NEED TO BE INDIVIDUAL ONES. INSTEAD, THE STUDENTS WERE BEING ENCOURAGED TO WORK AS GROUPS. (JH)

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FINAL REPORT

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AMERICAN HISTORY LABORATORY PROJECT

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WILLIAM R. TAYLOR
Chief Investigator

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INTRODUCTION

The historians who conducted the American History Laboratory Project ("pre-pilot") at Smith College in the Summer of 1966 had as their premise a mutually-shared conviction that the introductory survey course in American History as it now exists in most colleges and universities is unsatisfactory.

The survey course as we have experienced it exists in two forms, or in a combination of these two forms. The first one involves the "professor" in giving a series of lectures conducting the students on a chronological tour of the history of the United States from the colonial period to the present. The students are asked to absorb the substance of his lectures (and of the textbook or of any "outside readings" which may be assigned) and to be able to re-present this substance in the course exams. The second form in which the survey course presently exists involves the students making a series of scheduled stop-offs at the scenes of major historiographical battles. Through various means such as the "Amherst Pamphlets" they are asked to consider the arguments of the historians about whether, for example, the New Deal was an Evolution or a Revolution, whether Jacksonianism was the Common-Man-in-Ascendance or Capitalism-Triumphant. The students are given representative statements of the various sides of the arguments and are asked to take sides or to mediate.

At the operational level, our objectives to these courses centered on the limited (or even demeaning) nature of what they asked the students to do. In the first form of the survery course (which, to be sure, hardly exists in its pure form in better schools today), the student is asked to absorb a set of facts or a set of other people's historical generalizations), to remember them for a period of time, and to re-present them in an intelligible order on exam days. These are limited operations, structurally the same as the student was asked to perform from late grade school on through high school. For the student who had a thorough high school American history course, the first type of college survey course has practically nothing to offer--certainly there is nothing inherent in its structure which asks the student to perform new operations, or to expand his intellectual powers and skills. At best, the student enjoys a certain increment in gross knowledge.

The second type of the survey course does demand of the student some new or expanded operations. He is asked to criticize, judge, and choose between sets of other peoples' generalizations. This represents some advance, but when all is said and done the student is at best a mediator and critic, not a

protagonist, or a creator. The terms of even the most ambitious intellectual activity he engages in in such a course have still been set for him by other people, and by the authorities.

These were our objections to the survey courses as presently constituted insofar as our critique focussed on the question of what is asked of the student, what promise of intellectual growth it could offer him. We found, moreover, that we had a more basic philosophical objection to the course. It seemed to us that the survey course tended to falsify the act of "doing history." At the hands of even the most sensitive and circumspect of teachers, there prevails in the survey course a notion that the terms and questions of historical enquiry, that the "problems" and "issues" have been forever set (by the past itself, by "history," or by some other mysterious force), and that to be a historian is to address oneself to one or more out of this set of questions. Structurally there is nothing in the course that will bring the students to an understanding of how the act of doing history comes about. There is no procedure in the survey course to communicate to the students how an interest or a curiosity comes to a man doing history, how an historical inquiry can be made to speak to this interest, and how a historian comes to have as active a role, certainly, as the material itself in setting the terms of his inquiry. It is probably this deeper conceptual shortcoming in the survey course that does most to force the student into his essentially passive role of absorber, or mediator, or whatever. It is this, ultimately, which bars him from coming to see his mind (or the historian's mind) as a forming agent. Instead, the student comes to accept the shape of the historical discussion or argument as laid out for him by others, by the "historians."

It was in light of these criticisms of the introductory survey course in American History as now constituted that we decided on the objectives of the Project. When we felt the need of a rallying cry or a shorthand expression of what we were about, we resorted to saying that we intended to "free the students to do history." By this we meant putting them in a position where they could pose their own historical questions and go about answering them as a historian would. We had some reason to believe that this was not a hopeless endeavor. For the past several years one of our number had taught the upper-division course in American Intellectual History at the University of Wisconsin in a fashion that involved some advance towards this ideal and had had encouraging results from it.

As pure and as attractive as the ideal "to free the students to do history" was, though, we found that it was a very complicated notion and that we would have to make some distinctions and decisions before we began. The most important of these had to do with assumptions and processes connected with our postulate that the students should form their own historical questions.

This could take place at one or two levels, we decided. On the one hand, the students could be presented with a number of given sets of historical records or artifacts (such as, say, the records of the town of Chesterfield, Massachusetts; or the buildings and records of the Northampton Association, a utopian experiment of the 1840's; or the papers of Margaret Sanger), and be told that they were to pick one of these options, one that they found interesting, and proceed to do history on it. If we decided to proceed in this way, the students would begin to form their own inquiry and questions after they had chosen, more or less arbitrarily, a given topic area. We came to feel, however, that this way itself involved a certain falsification of the way history is written, and that a more radical alternative was open to us.

History, we agreed, at its best, has its birth in some preoccupation or concern of the individual who writes it. The individual who decides to do history (rather than, say, poetry) in effect decides to objectify or explore this concern of his in a distinctively "historical" way. Could we not devise, we asked ourselves, a course mechanism which would prompt the students to a similar experience: the objectification or expression of a personal interest of theirs, and the translation of this into an historical inquiry? We decided we would choose this more radical way of proceeding: it seemed truer to the notion of an experiment. In the course of time, we came to refer to this process whereby the student would objectify an interest of his by way of an historical investigation, as "self-generation."

During this planning stage of the pre-pilot project we made great efforts to bring to light whatever assumptions, conscious or otherwise, we would be building into the mechanics of the experiment. We were only partially successful in doing this. For one, we were only partially aware at first that we were making our committment to "substance" rather than to "method." That is to say, in inviting the students to do history right-off as fully functioning historians we were assuming that they would need no preliminary training in a set of historians' skills. Indeed, we were not considering the question whether a discrete body of such skills does exist (this is still a moot point with us). We were just assuming that problems of how to proceed are best confronted <u>in situ</u>: that "skills" and "tools" are ways of solving problems, and that just as the problems themselves come up in the setting of a living investigation, so too could the attempts at solution. The result of all this was that we gave no abstract methodological training to the students.

The other assumption into which we fell more or less unawares was that the historical inquiries of the students would naturally be individual projects. To some extent this assumption was a corollary of our committment to "student self-generation:" the

better a student self-generated, the more intimate to his real self would be the concerns he would objectify in doing his history, and the less likely it would be that he would share with other students these concerns and the particular objectification of them he decided on. Again, we had not really considered how naturally this result--projects done alone rather than by groups--followed from our committment to self-generation. It was ironic that we should have fallen into this fostering of individual projects, for we had been at pains all along to deny the criticism that we were only turning sophomores into "little graduate students." Yet, for all our denials, it now seems in retrospect we more or less unconsciously adopted one of the most characteristic features of graduate work--the individual working alone on his own project and reporting back through a paper or a seminar to "fellow" students.

METHOD.

The American History Laboratory Project, consisting of twenty students, four senior historians, and five instructors, assembled at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, for a period of ten weeks in the Summer of 1966. During this span the project was visited in numerous ways by people connected with the staff and faculty of Smith College.

Smith College was chosen as the site for the project because of the availability and range of its facilities such as classroom and library. Besides the college itself, Northampton and the surrounding area are particularly rich with subjects for historical investigation, and with facilities such as the Forbes Library, etc. Furthermore, one of the participating senior historians, Stanley Elkins, is a professor at Smith.

The senior historians were, besides Professor Elkins, Eric Lampard, Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin; Eric McKitrick, Professor of History at Columbia University; and William R. Taylor, Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin. The instructors working in the project were David Rothman, Assistant Professor of History at Columbia University; David Allmendinger, Neil Coughlan, Steven Nissenbaum, and Donald Scott, graduate students in American History at the University of Wisconsin.

The twenty students (or, as we officially styled them, "the co-investigators") were, with the exception of one Junior, all college Sophomores, taking various arts and science curricula, and intending on a variety of majors. They were from four schools, Amherst, Columbia, Smith, and Wisconsin, from diverse backgrounds, and somewhat brighter than the average group one would encounter in the Sophomore American History survey at a state university such as Wisconsin. The students were given free room and board at one of the Smith College dormitories

and $300.00 salary for their six-week stint with the project.

Proximate preparation for the project began with a three-day conference at Smith in the Spring of 1966. Three representatives each from the senior and junior staffs attended and engaged in a series of discussions to orient themselves as to what they intended on for the Summer.

The entire staff was present for the ten-week span of the project, beginning in late June. The first two weeks were a period of staff planning, the following six weeks were devoted to effecting the experiment with the students, and the last two weeks were spent evaluating the results. During the two-week planning period in late June and the first few days of July, the staff in a series of daily conferences made the basic decisions as to philosophy and strategy which are embodied in the introduction to this final report. Furthermore, they decided tentatively on the procedures they would use to implement these with the students. The basic class unit, it was agreed, would be the seminar. There were to be four of these, each with five students in it. These seminars were to be of constant composition for the length of the project, and were to be conducted by the junior staff. David Allmendinger, David Rothman, and Donald Scott would each run one of them, and Neil Coughlan and Steven Nissenbaum would together run the fourth seminar. Each seminar would be autonomous, and would meet as often as the students and seminar leaders thought necessary. (This turned out in practice to mean much variation: during the first two weeks of the project the seminars met as frequently as daily, and during the latter stages of the project some of the seminars met as infrequently as two times on a given week.)

What lecturing to the whole group there was to be, it was agreed, would be done by the members of the senior staff. Further, it was decided that, in keeping with the experimental nature of the project, there would be no formally projected series of lectures, but that both their frequency and substance would be determined by the needs of the students and their research projects. However, a regular weekly time was reserved to be open for a lecture should one be needed. The senior staff also undertook to be available every day for consultations with the individual students.

The most difficult and the most crucial problem we faced during the two-week planning session was how to come up with a method which would induce the students to "self-generate," to recognize or formulate an interest of theirs and to translate this into an historical inquiry. It was a problem we didn't solve, nor for that matter did we progress towards a solution. Either the attempt to induce the students to self-generate is a mad one, like trying to induce a person to live life, or the attempt was valid and we simply lacked the conceptual equipment with which to devise a method to carry it through. Finally, and in desperation, we decided that the only move that seemed to hold promise was to

present the students with an exercise that would force them into a history-writing position (and possibly into a self-generating one, too!). We would ask them to perform a small task which would involve them in trying to talk intelligibly about some past human activity which presumably had some personal importance for them. Thus our "grand-parent paper." The day after they arrived we told the assembled group in the morning that they were each to go and write us an essay--"about your grandparents"--and turn it in late that afternoon. As much to catch strays as anything else (and with some conceptual basis on our ruminations that to exist as a historically conditioned creature is to be placed in time and space), we similarly asked them on the day after the grandparent paper to write us an essay on "the relevance of place to your experience." This is how we began with the students in the American History Laboratory Project; the continuation of the story properly belongs in the next section of the report, "Results."

RESULTS

A. Seminar conducted by David Allmendinger:

In accordance with the assumptions and questions about self-generation, Allmendinger decided to conduct his seminar as non-directedly as possible. Such a strategy would permit him to see what the students could generate by themselves as well as discover a typology of the problems students working on their own would encounter and what kinds of help they would need at what particular points. In the first session of the seminar, when the task was to discuss the grandparent essay, Allmendinger let the students talk without any direction. The discussion consisted of comparisons of anecdotes about their grandparents. After over an hour of this, Allmendinger made a distinction between grandfathers and grandfather essays and suggested they discuss the essays at the next meeting. At this meeting, they proceeded as before, whereupon Allmendinger, adopting his most directive role of the summer, attempted to give them some analytical skills. He wrote on the board; nearly everything he wrote or said came back to him during the course of the summer, though none of the analytical skills appeared again.

At this point the students began to generate among themselves and to feel pressure to find, pursue, and complete a "project." In line with the non-directive, self-generative nature of the seminar, Allmendinger began interpreting their cues, taking the students' suggestions and making them see how their simple wonderings might be turned into investigations. Since they complained about not really being co-investigators, it was decided that all would work together, each on everyone's ideas. Janice Jacopian had expressed a vague interest in the Victorian houses of Northampton, so the class toured the Kitely house, with the implicit task that all

would assist in defining a set of questions Janice might pursue. One student played the piano, two others complained in the living room, while Jacopian sketched floor plans. It seemed apparent that none--including Jacopian--was particularly interested in her project. The group tried their own sessions of co-investigatory brainstorming on the Victorian house, sources she might discover. These sessions were tried for everyone in the seminar--including the instructor's own work.

As the students settled into their own projects non-direction became more demanding and almost impossible. If a project even approached a level of professional competence, it required background on a part of the instructor to suggest questions, sources, etc. (See subsequent discussion of the consulting role of the senior staff.) If the project remained in limbo, it required a personal, individualized virtuosity on the part of the instructor to suggest ways to bring it into focus.

Though after a while the students had projects they professed to be interested in, Allmendinger decided to take the group to the Chesterfield cemetery in order to see what would happen when a group was thrust into the midst of cold historical artifact. The class went to the Chesterfield cemetery having been told to do three things: 1) To write everything they could about the cemetery; 2) Then and only then to ask a series of questions about the cemetery; 3) Then and only then to suggest what other kinds of sources and questions they might be led to from a study of one cemetery. The students began by looking at each stone. Bonvillion took charge quickly and told the other students that they would have to stop and ask questions and to do this with some method. When they couldn't decide, Bonvillion declared a 15 minute think period, then a conference on questions and divisions of labor. They conferred and argued about what constituted a viable question to pursue.

Among the questions they came up with were:

"What constitutes a generation? Can you trace them?
"Can you trace family histories?"
"Should we record every stone?" (they decided not to, because 'the evidence will always be there')
"Should description be complete?"
"Can you tell about deaths per decade in the town? What would that suggest?"
"Study customs in names? Epitaph customs?"
"Study effects of wars? Epidemics?"
"Who dies first, men or their wives? men or women?"
"Life spans of parents vs. children."
"Occupational information deduced from stones."
"Social hierarchy from stones. Kinds of stones--their wearing, introduction, etc."
"Study terms of address (Mr., Esq., Deacon). Who were town's first families? enduring families?"

"Numbers of years per generation—changes? differences in families? Oddities of burial customs? (Some families together with outsiders)
"Child deaths."
"Size of family plots. Does this indicate anything about emigration from the town? or simply a shift to another cemetery?"
"Family intermarriages can be traced."
"Maiden names of women—when were they first recorded? When were there most spinsters?"
"Nationality of names—when the non-English begin if ever."
"Epitaphs and carvings by era."
"Who would be likely to be buried in a family plot, versus the town plot? Did burial in the town cemetery signify social standing?"

After raising these and other questions of a similar nature, each of the students went about a task. Bonvillion worked on war veterans and their ages; Pietrowski worked on names and ages at death; Jacopian and Trott worked on families, tracing them for generations, as did Ware. Allmendinger worked on spinsters and maiden names. Bonvillian considered this the most exciting thing done so far. Jacopian disagreed. After 2½ hours in the cemetery, the group went to the Chesterfield historical society, which contained mainly old artifacts. But the students also got interested in the town genealogy and Bonvillion found the records of the Methodist church.

Several days after this experience in the Chesterfield cemetery Bonvillion and Ware undertook to study the Northampton Association, a Fourierist community that existed just outside Northampton for several years in the 1840's. They sought to enlist the aid of other members of the group in this inquiry, but were turned down principally because Trott, Jacopian and Pietrowski did not at this point appear to want to abandon the various 'projects' upon which they were now embarked, even though none had been very successful with his project. Bonvillion and Ware proceeded in the same manner as they had in Chesterfield, asking and pursuing similar questions. This task was pursued with great energy by Bonvillion and Ware for the rest of the summer, a pursuit which included bumming a ride to Yale with two of the instructors so that they could go through the MacDonald manuscripts.

B. Seminar conducted by Donald Scott:

The grandfather and place essays were treated as examples of written discourse by focussing particularly upon those essays written by members of the group. An attempt was made to let the discussion follow its own form by improvising whatever guidance

was given from the categories, vocabulary, etc. that the students themselves devised in the course of their analysis. Rather quickly the students drew a dichotomy between those papers that were considered "personal" and those considered "historical." They quickly concluded that Woodie White's essay was the most historical--its historicity was a function of the "importance" of the "events" that touched the lives of his grandparents. This importance was expressed in terms of the topicality of the particular events--in this instance, the Tuskaloosa sit-in. At the next meeting there was a parallel discussion of the place essays; again the students adopted the terminology of personal and historical but supplemented it with the terms, "objective" and "subjective." When left to their own course, the discussions quickly became extremely abstract, leaving behind the concrete examples at hand.

The students were assigned the task of analyzing White's essay as concretely as possible to find out what made it historical and then to compare it with one they considered "personal." Secondly, they were asked to pick the two they thought were most different and analyze these differences. Thirdly, they were to pick five essays and write a brief essay about them. These tasks were done in varying degrees of energy--several members did a rather perfunctory job. For the most part, these concrete analyses did not carry the students beyond the vocabulary and abstract problems of the nature of history that they had come up with in discussion. The criteria upon which they based their choice of five essays, rather than being substantive, were derived from the dichotomies between personal and historical, objective and subjective.

At this point, Scott called in the students' journals and, basing his selections upon the journals, grandfather and place essays, and class discussion, gave individual assignments. These individualized assignments were to give each student something to let his mind play upon freely--with no sense that they were "to get" something from them. Accordingly, they were asked to jot down whatever struck them as they read. To Halloway, because he had written of his grandparents in terms of Jewish Ghetto experience, Scott suggested reading Jews Without Money, hoping that a similar phenomenon viewed from a different perspective might be provocative. To Kathy Murray, whose first year at college she considered overwhelming, Scott suggested Twenty Years at Hull House. To Woodie White whose most persistent query concerned what he considered the anomaly of Mary Ruud, a small town girl who "wasn't the typical northern Wisconsiner," Scott suggested Winesburg, Ohio. To Mary Ruud, curious about prejudice and attitudes toward Negroes, Scott suggested Uncle Tom's Cabin. To George Dent, who spoke engagingly of his first year at Columbia and in New York City, Scott suggested essays by Randolph Bourne. Without qualification, these assignments were unyielding. There were few journal entries concerning them, and those that were

made were not about what these readings might have sparked, but about what the students thought their instructor wanted from the assignments. For example, Woodie White commented that he enjoyed Winesburg, but didn't see its relevance--to history, the course, or a project. This response was typical and recurred in the half-hour conferences Scott had with each student about the books they had read.

Scott then asked them to bring their journals to the next class and told them that the class would be constructed from the various interests and entries the students had developed by this time. Mary Ruud opened this class by raising the question of how or whether it was possible to know if what the newspapers said about Viet-Nam was true. When this question was thrown to the group in the form of how did they think it could be dealt with historically, George Dent suggested that Mary pick an historical event such as the battle of Bull Run and see whether the Hampshire Gazette account was accurate. This question and suggestion led to a fairly imaginative discussion about how the reliability of an account as well as a "true" picture of an historical event could be assessed. Equally interesting was how quickly this interest broke down when the class moved to the "interests" of the others, questions which those who had them weren't really involved in and which seemed to have been chosen because the students felt they "ought" to have them.

Feeling that the students didn't have the experience and resources necessary to "self-generate" an historical inquiry, Scott decided to direct them to some explicit historical material. Accordingly, the students were asked to read Jonathan Edward's The Narrative of Surprising Conversions, and in a brief essay based upon this source, tell what they could of Northampton in the 1740's. The reasons for selecting this were similar to those that lead to consideration of starting the students with a document about Chesterfield during our June planning sessions. After discussing their treatments of Northampton in which Scott took the most consciously directive role he had all summer--he took their questions and conceptions of Puritanism and forced them back into the document, getting them to see that when they used such abstractions they obscured rather than illuminated what was happening in the document--Scott decided to have them look at the town from a different kind of document, the Hampshire Gazette.

The students were told to look through the paper focussing on the decade from 1840-1850 and jot down in their journals whatever struck them as curious, odd, or strange, or of interest. After several days, Scott gave them one issue and asked them to read it completely and as carefully as possible and then to take anything that struck them and formulate one question about it. Several of the reasons for this assignment: to see how material that had little dramatic impact and little coherence might be approached by

the students, what kinds of curiosities and questions might emerge, and what kind of "inquiry" might be generated if they were asked to start with one question rather than to think in terms of an eventual project. Scott was also interested to see at what points the students would "block" in pursuing what appeared to them as "matter of fact" questions.

With the exception of White, whose reaction to the newspaper was that the contents were "ludicrous," the class was surprised and excited by the newspaper. The initial excitement turned for some to boredom and frustration when they did not have something specific in mind upon going into the newspapers. Kathy Murray was struck, genuinely and perhaps for the only time in the six weeks, by an article condemning consanguinary marriage and suggesting that the result was degeneration into idiocy. Mary Ruud, though committed to another inquiry ("early Smith students," an inquiry she developed outside the seminar and through discussion with one of the senior staff members), was struck by the fact that in a single issue of the paper there were six notices of bankruptcy and wondered whether there was a depression. Woodie brought no question to class but through discussion of the issue and some promptings became interested in the benevolent reform activities that were mentioned and wondered what political parties the reformers belonged to. George Dent whose interest and work in the paper had gained greater focus (he, however, constantly felt overwhelmed by how much investigation he felt was necessary even for answering trivial questions) wondered what the political role of the newspaper was.

The remaining classes of the six weeks were devoted to developing these nascent questions into inquiries that proceeded in some kind of orderly and productive fashion. Such questions as what materials, what kinds of materials, and what procedures each question raised were dealt with. In these meetings, two major problems emerged: first, though at times the discussions were helpful to particular individuals whose inquiry was under consideration those not engaged in something closely related were quickly bored; second, the students seemed to lack the experience and resources to move in more than a lineal fashion. For example, if one person was trying to locate historically particular individuals in order to deal with the question (to use George Dent's) of the role and influence of the newspaper, the students were resourceful in raising questions and pursuing this task, but unable at this point, without promptings, to see or develop the need for other kinds of operations, such as a comparison of newspaper content with lyceum or sermon content.

C. Seminar conducted by Neil Coughlan and Steven Nissenbaum:

During the first working week with the students, we met together once each day--a pace that quickly moderated thereafter. For the better part of this first week we discussed the two sets of papers (on grandparents and place) that the students had written earlier. We decided not to limit these discussions to the papers of our own five students; and in fact all the papers that were examined in any detail had been written by students outside the group. Our working assumption was that the papers could most effectively be used to provoke in the students a sense of their own cultural rootedness, and that this sense would help them perceive and sympathize with the corresponding cultural rootedness of other persons and times. To this end we had the students informally choose a limited number of papers--it turned out that the papers chosen were those that seemed notably good or bad to the students--and we examined these papers and tried to determine both how they were put together and why they had elicited a particular reaction in those who read them. The initial response to this procedure, which was quite general and presumably "stock," was that the construction (and the merit) of the various papers depended on nothing other than the literary sophistication or luck of the authors. Our initial problem was to render this response untenable. It was in the course of the ensuing effort that the attention of at least most of the students was engaged to any significant extent. We suggested that literary sophistication itself might often involve little more than the ability to tune clearly into certain cultural wave-bands that were momentarily appealing--that this kind of sophistication was a matter of "style;" in other words, only insofar as culture itself is a matter of style. By the end of our second session, it had become apparent to the whole group, we believe, that the "good" papers were no more successful than the "bad" ones once certain culturally loaded devices were "deloaded." The difference between success and failure was seen as little more than the difference between cool and square; and everybody seemed to recognize that this kind of difference inevitably disappears after perhaps a generation.

We hoped that this was a collective insight that might be put to use--that it might provide the basis for a historical way of looking at historical materials. After some further discussion, then, we decided to have the students read material that we felt might be similar in form to the two papers that they had written themselves, but which was nonetheless "historical": we decided on a random selection of autobiographies written by persons who had been born between 1845 and 1850--100 years before the students who would read them. We hoped that the students would find these works somewhat accessible in the light of our discussions; and they decided to meet by themselves to discuss what they had read, and then report on their discussion to us at our next formal meeting. Little was accomplished at either of these sessions; they gave us and the students the first taste

of a kind of frustration we were all to encounter more and more frequently during the summer. The students had been unable to read the autobiographies with any interest or care, and the general meeting turned into little more than a lecture. Moreover, everyone was quickly at a loss as to how to proceed; we refused to press the issue and began to wait for the students to formulate areas of investigation out of--as we insisted--their own interests and concerns, whether these might or might not seem to have anything to do with history. In one way or another, all five students rather soon came up with some such formulation; but by this time the seminar had ceased to exist as such. For the remaining weeks we met on an irregular basis--on demand of the students--but these meetings were predictably unsatisfactory. From this time on the summer was the history of five separate projects.

There were three cases of simple failure. In one the student, Andrew Zoob, could not "self-generate." He spent the weeks in fretful idleness or in spurts of distracted pursuit of "subjects that might be interesting." In the two other cases of failure, the students, Steven Sholruff and Altara Shepherd, eventually chose topics: mid-nineteenth century children's books, and the writings of Henry James (specifically, whether they could be made to yield insight into the nature of his America), respectively, but they could not do history with these topics. The difficulties in validly using literary sources for historian's purposes are considerable, and in the face of these difficulties the projects flagged and never really got off the ground.

The other two cases yielded more advanced results. Phillip Lawrence came to the experiment with his vocational plans already formed (he will be a historian of science), and with an interest in working on Edward Hitchcock, a mid-nineteenth century American geologist. He worked hard and regularly on Hitchcock's writings and papers, and produced a lengthy paper on his man at the end of the Project. It became obvious quite early that for Lawrence "doing history" on Edward Hitchcock would consist in exposing him as a man who let religiously grounded fears deter him from drawing the rational conclusions that his scientific observations adumbrated. Lawrence, it seems, had read somewhere that scientific thinkers fit into two categories: those who transcend the cosmologies of their time and culture, and those who do not. He would show that Hitchcock, because of his supernaturalism, fitted into the latter category. The two seminar leaders attempted, with only the most limited success, to indicate to Lawrence the moralism that underlay his own approach to Hitchcock, and tendency of this moralism to limit and warp his inquiry.

Rosalyn Grunmann, the fifth student, found the two seminar leaders to be crypto-Deweyians in our notions about education, and decided that she would like to do something with John Dewey.

One of the seminar leaders was studying the early Dewey and eventually suggested to Grunmann that she focus on Dewey's change from Hegelianism to experimental psychology in the 1880's and 1890's, and that she seek to find out why. She engaged the issue earnestly and intelligently, and with the prompting of the instructor seemed to attain some legitimately historical insights into her subject; when it came time for a final statement of what she had found, though, the complexities overwhelmed her, and she found she could not write a paper.

D. Seminar conducted by David Rothman:

This seminar was conducted on the hypothesis that the free play of the student's own curiosity would involve him meaningfully in a project. However, Rothman had decided to try and move the students into projects as quickly as possible. The pressures he would bring on them would be general ones: "Choose," rather than "Choose this."

The first two sessions of the seminar, devoted to the grandfather and place papers, the groups discussed and analyzed these documents from the perspective of what sort of generalizations could be abstracted from them. Instead of turning to an introspective examination of the nature of communication, the instructor tried to have the students make use of these papers by fitting the pieces together rather than taking them apart. What do these documents tell us? Are grandparents biological accidents? If so, how do you know? Do those raised in small towns look back upon it with scorn? If so, what reasons do they offer? Some textual analysis of course entered here--does document three support or refute the generalization?--but the effort was to construct generalizations rather than reveal the inadequacy of these statements. After the first two sessions, with the hope of having the students define their own interests, the instructor asked them to reread the two documents and construct their own hypotheses and support them. And to some extent the assignment worked; they returned with broad, if vague, notions of topics that interested them. They had managed to exercise some choice, turning to privacy, community, immigration, mobility, urbanization as fields of curiosity. Not that they managed to read these documents and construct carefully thought-out hypotheses, but at that time their failure did not worry me particularly: they had managed to construct a starting point for the project.

The students were next sent to read John Winthrop's Model of Christian Charity--to read it from the perspective of their own interests. The instructor was attempting to bring them into documents with some questions, however vague, and to see if they could explicate a text for their own purposes. The instructor had here accepted the notion (new to him) that to send a student to a document without reason would not be helpful, that a document by nature of being a document would not spur inquiry. The session that fol-

lowed was very satisfying to the instructor personally, and to the group. Rothman was back doing what he had often done before--analyzing a document, revealing the presuppositions behind it, using it to illuminate a moment in time. The difficulty, as it turned out, was that the instructor was doing the illuminating and the students were following along, to be sure responding to his questions, but not themselves proving able to milk the document for its worth. They revealed very little ability, perhaps none, to read the document in advance and see it from their own perspective of interest. The young lady curious about urbanization did not stop to ask herself what sort of cluster of population would follow in a group that announced these ideals; that Winthrop called for a city on the hill did not even catch her attention. Similarly, the young lady interested in privacy concluded that privacy was probably not a very important value to those people, but she then went on to note that by implication then privacy and Christianity were opposed one to the other, she could not believe that, and hence something must be wrong with her reasoning. Still I went ahead--and in perspective it seems only foolhardy--and turned them loose to begin to define their particular projects, offering specific suggestions as to where they might start, or suggesting they sit down and define what they wanted to investigate. The seminar at this point fractionalized and the instructor never did manage to bring it back together again.

Once off on their own, the results varied. One student plunged in eagerly and energetically into the sources that would tell him about social structure in Northampton, 1660-1740. Others had more or less difficulty in defining their projects and finding the materials necessary for answering their questions. One student, interested in privacy, never did manage to make her interest the focus of investigation. It turned out that there was an incredibly large gap between interest and performance. The eventual projects that came out of the investigations were not very impressive. Still I was in the end surprised at the amount of enthusiasm, and the quality of the lessons, those who had carried out a project found in them. They came away from the experience fully cognizant of the limits of what they had done. The project had not bred pious ignorance. Quite the contrary. In three instances the students recognized quite clearly their own inadequacies before the material, the complexity of the material, and the fascination with the material. They were eager to re-enter the maze and try and work it out. Trying to work with nine variables when they had not yet worked with one hindered them. Inexperience about asking questions of documents did too. And there was some tendency to read a document like an encyclopedia article: take it at its face value and report on it, just like in the old high school days. But the eventual failures of the students should not obfuscate the very impressive energy that the project released. In almost every instance they found themselves, to their own surprise, drawn to the library and anxious to work in the materials. More-

over, exposure to the stuff of history had an intellectual impact on them. They knew now just what was the nature of historical records. They had a clear sense of the complexity, incompleteness, and chaos of what remained from the past. Rather than simply frustrate them, the confrontation sparked their involvement. The instructor thinks it is apparent to everyone that further training and use of documents must precede the leap into a project. But he believes it of great importance that the instructors remember just how exciting a project can be for the student. Getting them to do history involves them in a manner that the text-book survey course never could. Perhaps even more important, it gives them an intimate sense of what history is. Cliched notions of history as model break down and what emerges is a personal and meaningful awareness of the nature of studying the past. Surely this is more significant accomplishment than hearing the five causes of the Civil War.

E. Lectures given to all participants:

From time to time during the summer, usually on Friday afternoon, the whole group assembled. Sometimes these meetings consisted of a discussion of problems that had arisen and were attempts to elicit the suggestions of the students. At other times, more formal presentations were given by various staff members and outside guests. These latter presentations fell into two rough categories: talks by Donald Weinberg, of Columbia University about some departures he hoped to take in giving a Western Civilization course and by Professor Stanley N. Katz of the University of Wisconsin Department of History, about a freshman seminar, embodying some of the assumptions we were working with, he had conducted at Harvard College; and talks by Professors Curti and McKitrick and Taylor on aspects of their own historical investigations.

After approximately 2 1/2 weeks, Professor Taylor spoke of his own historical interest in the family, how it had arisen from previous work he had done, and some of the questions he was asking and material he was using. The students listened with interest, many said they found it 'fascinating,' but all appeared to feel that it served mainly to show the immense intellectual distance between their 'projects' and that of Professor Taylor. They found it overpowering and it exacerbated already existing feelings that they had insufficient knowledge, time, discipline to undertake meaningful inquiry. In short, this lecture, as to an extent did those given by Professor Curti and Professor McKitrick, made them feel that what they thought was expected of them was beyond their capabilities.

At the next general meeting, Professor McKitrick spoke of how he and Professor Elkins had become interested in and written their articles about the "frontier thesis," hoping to show how both a curiosity and the situation in which they were at the time living informed their investigation. Many again found this 'fascinating,' though again they were totally unable to perceive a connection between what McKitrick spoke of and their own experiences. Professor Curti's talk in which he spoke of various ways in which he had gotten involved in historical inquiries (first, following a 'curiosity,' and second, generating an inquiry out of a topical interest, and third, undertaking an investigation out of the desire to test certain philosophical and methodological hypotheses), again while provoking interest and fascination provoked an awe that tended to be intimidating.

F. Consultations with senior staff:

The senior staff was available for consultation and guidance every afternoon. Most students took advantage of this availability--many saw each member several times. With few exceptions, the various visits a student made to the faculty were unrelated to each other. He would go to one member who would, taking what-

ever cues the student provided as to his interests, suggest 'topics' and material. A stab at this material would be made, then it would be abandoned, and another visit perhaps to another staff member would be made. A variation of this pattern consisted of series of visits that were related to the student's professed 'project', but the impact of pursuit of the suggestions gleaned was rarely evident.

DISCUSSION

Before discussing the implications of what went on in the more formal aspects of the experiment, note should be taken of how the twenty students, brought together by the course and presumably involved only in it, operated as a group. The student group as a whole and the members of individual seminars began almost immediately the process of defining themselves as a group. In their almost continuous floating bull sessions, the students used the grandfather and place essays as introductions to one another. This process of group definition was clearly heightened by the vagueness of the project in the student's eyes, the absence of cueing by the instructors, and the consequent need for the students to take their cues from their consultations with one another. This is not to suggest that they became a single, homogeneous group. The evidence in the log books refutes this, but a core group had appeared, strong enough to absorb the attention and provide a focus for the responses of others not yet affiliated.

Much that subsequently happened--and didn't happen--can be explained by this important development. The fascination of the group, and the various sub-groups, with themselves, exacted a high cost of those who at an early point chose to undertake a project; and in fact the idea of a project met with surprising resistance--at least on the part of some. Those students quickest to adopt projects were in many instances those most remote from the core group (overwhelmingly composed of the Wisconsin contingent). All of the logs, in fact, indicate that the students felt some tension between their group life and the apparent objective of the experiment, launching them on individual investigations that were generated from their own interests and curiosities. These 'hothouse' pressures should be noted in our assessment of the student's experiences with individual inquiry and with 'self-generation.' David Lawrence is instructive in this light.

David Lawrence chose a topic early, pursued it energentically throughout the experiment and produced both a report disclosing his findings and an evaluation of his experience of inquiry. Yet an examination of his log and his disclosures in his final interview, when coupled with the observations of his seminar instructor, throws another light on his experience. For one thing, he had to be assisted at every point--using his instructor as an individual tutor or research director--from the selection of a subject to the

location and strategy for interpreting the sources that he used. He complained in his log about the 'narrowness' of his subject and fretted about playing social scientist, which he called 'uninspiring.' On the other hand, he placed great emphasis in his final interview upon his having been "radicalized" (politically) through association with the core group of students, an experience to which he gave perhaps as much importance as to his research experience.

David Lawrence's experience, perhaps the most successful, in terms of the initial model of self-generated individual inquiry, shares much with those less successful than he, and suggests that the goal of individual inquiry on a "private" project as an end in itself was unjustified. We had begun by assuming that the process referred to as "self-generative" would be initiated as individual students took account of their response to either statements of their own concerning their consciousness of a past or to the data of a historical site. We assumed, furthermore, that their individual responses would lead them to want to undertake inquiries more or less on their own. Insofar as we had conceived of a role for the seminar teacher, we thought of him as acting as a guide to individual students and a counsellor and coordinator. We also assumed that the utility of the senior staff would come through their accessibility as experts to give guidance to students and seminar leaders alike when they got "stuck." It appears that we had been betrayed into one of the central assumptions of professional graduate instruction in history, namely that individual inquiry is an end in itself, and that any experimental course ought to be shaped around it and planned in such a way as to promote it. What occurred in the experiment appears to argue rather strongly against these assumptions.

The students appear not to have sufficient experience of an inquiring sort of sufficient resources to self-generate an inquiry that would develop in such a fashion as to bring them to an active consciousness of the operations involved in historical inquiry. The topics students 'generated' were remarkably comparable to the a-historical or non-topics that arise in the most conventionally conducted courses and brought students experiences not unlike those in any course that demands a 'term' paper. This effect, may, in part, be due to asking them to take a self conscious "interest" and from it formulate an inquiry, rather than confront them with 'raw data' and get them to play their interests, predilections, etc. across it. (Compare the results of Scott's assignments of books designed to strike the students' hinted-at interests and Allmendinger's experiences with Chesterfield and 'raw data.') The kinds of topics that emerged from asking the students to dredge up an interest from themselves, and formulate something to pursue from that--"fashions," "privacy," "authority," "doubt"--placed both the instructor and the student in undesirable situations. The teacher was faced with the task of trying to get students to concretize and historicize an abstract interest--a task for which the student possessed few analytical skills. It

fell upon the teacher to get the student into something concrete and even then it would appear that the students' response to guidance was more dutiful than informed. They appeared to have little comprehension of why they should proceed as had been suggested and little idea of options in materials, operations, and questions that might aid them in pursuing "their" interest. For many of the students, self-generation was an experience typical of the undergraduate or graduate student--being left alone to dream up his own topic, working alone, being frustrated, bored.

Many of these limitations appear to have been overcome with the Chesterfield experience. Interestingly, until this experience and the inquiry into the Northampton Association it engendered, Bonvillion had held in reserve what Eric Lampard called a "bureaucratic topic," that he had pursued as a term paper in a course during his freshman year. The remarkable thing about the list of questions that the group raised in the cemetery was the astonishing variety and sophistication of the students' questions--a variety and sophistication that no individual operating on his "own" topic had evinced. Even when consciously set to the task of raising questions for another's project, this same group had not shown nor developed the resources they revealed at Chesterfield. Another point worth emphasis is the initiative assumed by Bonvillion in structuring the inquiry and assigning specific tasks on the basis of the questions they had come up with.

CONCLUSIONS

Though many conclusions are implicit in the preceding section, it is perhaps helpful to emphasize a few areas in particular. In conducting a course of the kind envisioned in the pre-pilot at Smith College and the experimental course given at the University of Wisconsin this fall, certain alterations in staff relations and activities appear necessary. It rather quickly became obvious that the major instructional task lay in the seminar experiences. Accordingly, it would appear imperative that the distinction between senior staff and junior staff be eliminated; the senior member conducting such a course, if he is to be at all in touch with the processes going on, must conduct one of the small groups. (This change had been instituted at Wisconsin). So that the staff can work together most beneficially, so that a common language and set of experiences can emerge, each small group should be doing the same general thing at about the same general time.

The most important conclusion has to do with the Chesterfield experience, and the inquiry into the Northampton Association it engendered. It appears that it would be better to employ the student group as a group in developing inquiries by allowing the group collectively to become the means through which inquiries are generated and structured. It would also appear that confronta-

tion with "raw historical data" rather than personal experience should be the material out of which inquiries and interests are to be fashioned. (Again, this change has been instituted in the Wisconsin experimental course, where the students are being confronted with the large collection of materials collected by the State Historical Society on the Wisconsin Phalanx, a utopian community of the 1840's.) Additionally, more explicit attention might be paid to operational and analytical skills needed for the act of doing history. It is interesting in this light to note that it was at Chesterfield that these skills appeared to begin to be developed, perhaps because the concrete material at hand demanded it.

In mind here is the initial confrontation with the Chesterfield graveyard and what could perhaps be called the "Bonvillion effect," namely the capacity of the group to accept and criticize the suggestions of a student who takes the initiative in structuring the inquiry. Part of their discovery, and not the least part by any means, was their capacity to operate as a group when confronted with a recognizable problem. Whether this capacity could be sustained through successive stages of the group's investigation of the site is anybody's guess. It might well be that, left uncurbed, their individual interests would have led them, for a time at least, in so many directions that the group would have dissolved and the initial momentum would have been lost. If, however, we had made it a condition that whatever problems individual students or clusters of them chose to investigate, their findings would have to prove relevant to a study of, say, Chesterfield as a community, it might have been possible to keep them working, both together and apart, so to speak, throughout the duration of the experiment. While this is speculation, it is conceivable that this kind of corporate, but individualized, intellectual experience might have uncovered unsuspected resources in certain members of the group and consequently attenuated their eventual boredom with one another. One thing seems fairly certain: a situation of the kind projected would be far more manageable for a seminar instructor and require less virtuosity on his part. He, too, with some restraint, could co-operate as a member of the group without having to either prompt or to violate the interests of its members. It also seems that one of the problems that has bedeviled us from the start, how to "funnel" out, might in a large measure, take care of itself, since the group from its first confrontation would have been focusing on aspects of the situation that were radically connected. One aspect of the funnel effect that we have neglected to consider is the operational context generated by a knowledge of what others in the group are doing to contribute to the common task.

SUMMARY

The American History Laboratory Project was an attempt by a group of historians to devise an alternative to the introductory college survey course in American history, an alternative that would give the students a more realistic idea of how history is written, what goes into a "historical" statement, and that would rescue the student from his present essentially passive role of absorber or commentator and free him to "do history."

The project staff assembled at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, in the summer of 1966, and, after two weeks of preliminary planning, conducted an experimental course for twenty college students (all about to enter their sophomore year) for a period of six weeks. The principal experimental vehicle as it turned out were the four small seminars of five students each which met several times a week throughout the duration of the course. In these seminars attempts were made to induce each student to translate some interest or pre-occupation of his into a legitimate historical question and to pursue that inquiry with the materials, tools, and techniques of history.

By and large, despite a considerable variety of aids and plays used by the staff, the students were not able to formulate and carry out significant historical inquiries. A few did (or "came close"), and some others seem to have had noteworthy and presumably valuable intellectual experiences that took other forms. But as for finished "pieces" of history, there were few. There was, however, a great deal of enthusiasm and work on the part of the students.

In a sequel to the American History Laboratory Project, an introductory survey being given at the University of Wisconsin in the academic year 1966-67, the experiment is being continued with some modifications suggested by summer experience. For one, the attempt to have the students concoct and objectify into an historical inquiry an interest of their own (a process we called "self-generation") is being abandoned. Instead, they are being presented with the large body of data that remains of a particular historical phenomenon (in this case, a Wisconsin utopian community of the 1840's), and are being asked to do history upon it.

Secondly, an assumption that crept un-examined into the Project--namely, that the historical projects of the students would naturally be individual ones and not undertakings in common--is being systematically challenged. The various student seminars are being encouraged to pursue their inquiries as groups.

Thirdly, the summer project made it clear that the small seminars (as distinguished from the lectures and from individual

consultations) are the principal instructional vehicle in a course such as this, and that the distinction between senior staff and junior staff (operationally put: between lecturers and seminar leaders or "teaching assistants") ought to be minimized or abandoned. In particular, the summer experience made it clear that were the senior staff members not to have their own seminars, as do the teaching assistants, they would be quite out of touch with the course and the work of the students.

E.R.I.C.

The American History Laboratory Project was an attempt by a group of historians to devise an alternative to the introductory college survey course in American history, an alternative that would give the student a more realistic idea of how history is written, and rescue him from his present essentially passive role of absorber or commentator, in order to free him to "do" history.

The Project took the form of an experimental course for college Sophomores, given in the summer of 1966 at Smith College. The staff attempted to induce the student to objectify an interest of his into a legitimately historical inquiry: question-formulation, research, and writing.

The Project met with but limited success. Most often, the students lacked the resources and skills to "do" history in this total sense. The experiment is being continued at the University of Wisconsin in the academic year 1966-67. The staff there is incorporating certain modifications suggested by the summer experience. Instead of asking the students to generate their own projects, the staff is confronting them with the body of documents relating to an already chosen historical event. The staff is also attempting to challenge the assumption that the projects of the students need be individual ones. Instead, the students are being encouraged to work as groups.